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## Introduction: Towards Professional Wisdom

*David Carr, Liz Bondi, Chris Clark and Cecelia Clegg*

The editors of this volume are professional colleagues to the extent of having been academic contemporaries in different schools and departments of the University of Edinburgh over the course of many years. They have all also been directly concerned, beyond the groves of academe, with the pre- and in-service education and training of practitioners for various fields of professional work such as (precisely in the case of these editors) education, social work, counselling and ministry. It is also probably little exaggeration to say that despite working in professional fields with common occupational interests and concerns, the present editors barely knew each other until a few years ago. Moreover, we suspect that this general state of affairs is not unusual in most major universities in Britain and more widely.

The origins of the present volume may be traced back to a meeting between two editors following the discovery that both were working on much the same issues and problems of professional concern, albeit in rather different professional fields. One editor, exercised by the problem of how to understand the nature of professional deliberation and judgement in social work was alerted – ironically whilst on study leave at a university on the other side of the world – to the work of another editor working in his home university on much the same issues in the context of teacher education and training. It was soon apparent from the meeting following this discovery that professional fields such as education and social work, given their common concerns with general social welfare and health, could only stand to benefit from closer dialogue and cooperation between those bent on further understanding the character and effective conduct of such practices. Aside from

the scandal of academic apartheid between researchers working on similar issues and problems of professional practice in such relative academic isolation – particularly in contemporary contexts of professional policy-making in which practitioners are increasingly encouraged or required to work in closer collaboration – it is not very hard to see how reflection on the issues and problems in a field such as social work may be a potentially rich source of professional insight to teachers, and vice-versa.

Indeed, it soon became clear that that the issues and problems that had brought together two editors of this volume were not just confined to education and social work, but common to a wide range of professional or quasi-professional occupations that have been variously referred to as ‘semi-professions’, ‘vocations’, ‘caring professions’ or (in the preferred terminology of many contributions to this volume) ‘people professions’. It was but a short further step from appreciating the common occupational concerns of education and social work to recognizing that such other occupations as (for example) counselling, ministry and nursing, raised and faced precisely analogous questions and problems. In particular, it was clear that these and other occupations are implicated in issues of human association, welfare and flourishing that engender complex and difficult questions about the nature and status in such contexts of effective professional reflection and deliberation: issues, precisely, about what might be said to constitute wise judgement and conduct in such fields.

Towards clarification of such questions, we could start by asking how the professional reflection of teachers, social workers, counsellors, nurses and ministers might generally be distinguished from that of other human professions, trades or services. First, it seems to be widely agreed that the rational powers required for the effective pursuit of such

occupations might or should be regarded as forms of ‘practical reason’, procedural knowledge or ‘reflection in action’. That said, the precise logical form of such knowledge, reason or reflection is also a matter of lively debate, and it is to some of these disputes that the essays in the first part of this volume are addressed. Moreover, one key topic of debate in this connection is whether the knowledge or rational judgement required for the effective conduct of caring or people professions is reducible to the technical ‘evidence-based’ rationality to which modern professions as medicine seem sometimes to have aspired. There can be little question that the spectacular technical advances of modern medical science – no doubt reinforced by modern social scientific attempts to explain human behaviour in quasi-natural scientific terms – have encouraged general conceptions of professional practice as instruments or vehicles of social engineering. On such ‘scientistic’ views of professional practice, if the overall goals of human health, welfare and progress may be determined by rational scientific enquiry, and the means to such goals can be established by empirical research and experiment, then the desired goals might in principle be achieved by straightforward implementation of such identified means. There can be little doubt that education was widely so conceived in much influential twentieth-century educational theorising as a technology of pedagogy grounded in a (behavioural) science of learning.

A key difficulty about any such conception of profession, however, is that it is far from clear that either social or natural science is well-placed to determine the goals of human welfare and flourishing. The basic problem is that questions of human welfare and flourishing appear to be located in the space of ‘value’ rather than (social or natural) fact and are as such – not least in western and other liberal and plural democracies – inevitably

and invariably contested. While this is not of course to deny that values are either rational or objective, that sane and sensible values may need to be constrained by facts or evidence, or that there may be rationally better and/or worse ways of rationally resolving value disputes, it is to concede that the kind of enquiry appropriate to appraising values is primarily moral or ethical rather than scientific. Thus, in so far as ‘people professional’ deliberation is inevitably implicated in such value disputes it is arguably also more (or more centrally) moral or ethical than scientific – and, to be sure, it is now widely recognised that courses of education and training in such fields as education, nursing and social work might or should include a core ethical component.

However, in so far as the nature of ethical or moral reflection, deliberation, judgement and conduct is also philosophically contested, this clearly raises no less complex issues about the precise direction that professional ethics should take, and about the consequent best course of ‘people professional’ education and training. Indeed, one key issue here – of enormous significance for professional judgement in people or caring professions – concerns the extent to which any morally correct or defensible professional judgement may be expressed in the form of well-defined rules or principles of the kind found in the ethics of deontology and utilitarianism, and which are also the staple fare of much official professional policy and regulation. In this connection, some moral philosophers and theorists of professional ethics have inclined to a perspective known generally as ‘ethical particularism’ which effectively denies, given the highly situation-specific or context-sensitive character of moral thought and/or judgement, that such thought is at all susceptible to such regulation or codification. However, although particularism usually cites the authority and support of Aristotle (or of ancient and/or modern Aristotelian

virtue ethics), and though Aristotle clearly did hold that the virtuous moral response should be a matter of particular context-sensitive judgement, it is no less clear that he also explicitly subscribed to general moral rules and principles and saw particular moral judgements as nevertheless dependent upon some framework of such principles. In this regard, it probably makes best sense to observe some Aristotelian ‘mean’ between the more uncompromising moral regulation of deontic ethics and the more radical rejection of moral rules of latter day particularists. (More modest forms of particularism are defended by some contributors to this volume; but for criticisms of radical particularism, see Luntley, this volume, and Kristjánsson 2007, 2010.) Nevertheless, it is clear enough that such ‘people (and other) professional’ occupations as teaching, social work and nursing do require practitioners to make highly particular context-sensitive judgments in the course of their work, and that any ethics for such professions would need to include an adequate account of the logical grounds of such judgements.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the kind of virtue-theoretical perspective that is often enlisted in support of (radical or moderate) ethical particularism parts company with the moral rationalism of deontic ethics (the ethics of duty and utility) by insisting that genuine or full moral (virtuous) judgements or responses are by no means exclusively matters of reason or cognition – or at least of reason as cognitively conceived. For past and present virtue ethicists, virtues are dispositions to moral conduct that are no less affective than cognitive. Indeed, as one editor of this volume has elsewhere expressed this (Carr 2009), the virtues of virtue ethics are more or less equivalent to states of emotion, feeling or appetite ordered in accordance with some deliberative ideal of practical wisdom. But if moral (virtuous) responses and judgements are construed in this affectively grounded way,

then this would seem to have consequences for those human occupations – such as, precisely, the ‘people professions’ – in which the emotional dimensions of human association are significantly implicated. Indeed, while some perspectives on professional ethics seem to have supposed that professional relations should always be ‘impersonal’ or ‘disinterested’ and seek to eschew the emotional involvements or attachments that might lead to bias or other distorted judgement, it seems rather more intuitive to suppose that good social workers need to be sympathetic to clients, that good nurses need to be caring of patients and that good teachers need to be capable of warm and supportive relations with pupils. Virtue ethics can generally (and arguably better than other moral theories) be pressed in support of this more intuitively plausible view of the professional value of properly ordered feeling and emotion. So far; so good. But this also raises difficult questions and issues – some of which are addressed in the second section of this volume – about how such affective qualities might be developed, fostered and monitored in the education and training of ‘people professionals’.

This present volume addresses, directly or indirectly, all of these aforementioned questions, issues and problems about the nature of reflection and conduct in people professions. The volume has its origins in a successful and internationally well-attended University of Edinburgh conference, entitled ‘Towards professional wisdom: practical deliberation in the “people professions”’, organized and mounted by the editors in March 2008. The main aim of that conference was to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue on issues of common concern to a wide variety of professional fields such as education, social work, counselling, nursing and ministry. The conference set out to focus mainly on issues and problems concerning the character of deliberation and judgement in such ‘people

professions', specifically with a view to exploring the possibility that such occupations require the development of special kind of reflection or deliberation (perhaps along the lines of Aristotle's *phronesis* or practical wisdom). In the event, however, the conference also addressed such related but widely ranging issues as: the impact of official prescription and regulation on professional judgement; conflicts of professional judgement and public/political accountability; tensions between universal justice and equality and particular client need; the limits of professional concern for the personal problems of clients; the extent to which 'people professional' practice is grounded in theory; alternative models of professional deliberation to 'technical rationality'; the role of emotion and affect in 'people professional' practice; the possibility of non-scientific (narrative) sources of professional wisdom; and the role of the supervisor in the training and practice of people professionals.

In the wake of this meeting and the widespread professional interest that it provoked, the present editors decided that there would be much academic and professional value and merit in assembling a collection of invited essays on this wider range of conference themes: that, indeed, there seemed to be a quite regrettable gap in the literature of professional issues for work specifically addressed to such 'people-professional' themes in an appropriately inter-disciplinary and cross-professional way. Contributions were commissioned from a broad constituency of distinguished scholars in the fields of professional ethics and expertise from relevant 'people-professional' backgrounds and a wide range of academic disciplines such as philosophy, theology, politics, sociology and psychology (also see Clark et al. 2009). The second half of this introduction will therefore provide brief resumes of the fifteen contributory chapters to the present volume.



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The first part of the collection investigates the nature of knowing and deliberation in practice. The professions have an ambivalent relationship with technical and scientific knowledge: while it is universally acknowledged as the prime distinguishing and legitimating characteristic of modern professionals, it is much less clear that the whole of the professional's wisdom and skill in deliberating over difficult cases can be encompassed within the realm of scientifically validated technical expertise.

In chapter 2 Joseph Dunne contrasts the technical rationality that informs productive activities with the practical wisdom, derived from the Aristotelian *phronesis*, essential to effective engagement in human affairs. Members of a community of practice are committed to its characteristic outcomes; to sustain that commitment they nurture the characteristic capabilities or virtues of the practice. While the capabilities of a practice are both technical and practical, it follows from Dunne's exegesis that the cardinal virtue of people practices must be wise judgement or *phronesis*. The practically wise professional employs a capacity for engaged understanding and discerning judgement; she is able to distinguish unusual situations from everyday concerns and respond appropriately, mediating with generalities while always respecting the particularity of the case.

Michael Luntley, in chapter 3, challenges the widespread supposition – previously exemplified by Dunne in the preceding chapter with the common notion that the potter has 'know-how in his hands that is irrecoverable in any explicit propositions' (page xx) - that the knowledge of expert practitioners is somehow different in kind from the ordinarily recognised knowledge expressible in propositions. Luntley expands the concept of a proposition, arguing that propositional knowledge is no less than such merely because it

resists precise articulation or codification. He further maintains that it is not the thought-processes of the expert that represent extraordinary skill and judgement in response to difficult or unusual problems; on the contrary, it is the special procedures and knowledge application attributed to the novice that are extraordinary.

In chapter 4 Chris Clark further explores the reach and limits of technical rationality by examining ‘evidence-based practice’, now widely promulgated as the necessary and sole legitimate foundation of good practice in a growing range of human services. Notwithstanding its superficial attraction, evidence-based practice has in actuality been founded on a narrowly positivist conception of scientific evidence. Considering knowing for practice, Clark distinguishes actors’ background knowledge, whose content they are normally largely unaware of, from the foreground tools, both conceptual and tangible, that they consciously employ to carry out a task. Evidence-based practice may be a helpful source of foreground tools but fails entirely to ground the broader process of practical reasoning, or the practical wisdom which distinguishes the deeply experienced professional.

Daniel Vokey and Jeannie Kerr, in chapter 5, carry the discussion of practical reasoning into the arena of moral choices. They question the reliability of moral decision-making and ask what might serve as evidence of learning by students of the capacity to make better moral choices. Noting that moral decision-making commonly occurs in contexts of complexity that cannot be conclusively addressed by standard inferential reasoning, they argue that we must posit forms of non-inferential cognition, including moral intuition and moral judgement. Vokey and Kerr draw on Haidt’s (2001) social intuitionist model of moral judgement that emphasises the priority of felt apprehensions

over logical reasoning. They identify discernment – the proper mean between rashness and timidity in moral judgment – as the capacity needed to meet the challenge of complexity.

In the final chapter of this section of the work addressed to issues of professional deliberation, Elizabeth Campbell also probes what is needed for preparing students of education to show appropriate moral example and engage in effective ethical deliberation in their eventual professional practice. In her own research, students appeared barely conversant with normative ethical standards, but did tend to remember rules or prohibitions pertaining to notorious but rare infractions. They were particularly impressed by their negative experiences of the unethical practice of their supervising teachers. Campbell notes that while the development of moral and ethical judgement mostly occurs before entering training, real understanding of professional issues only develops as the fruit of professional experience. All the same, she argues that there is a case for more explicit and focused pre-service teaching of professional ethics.

The second part of the volume takes up questions about the personal and affective dimensions of professional engagement. For some in the people professions, emotional connections with others are a key reward of their work. But is such emotional involvement wise? How can the requirement for professionals to treat their ‘clients’ impartially be combined with the inevitably personal nature of their interaction with those for whom they care or those whose development they seek to facilitate? How do we equip professionals to manage the emotional nature of their work? What expectations do we hold about how we engage with our own and others emotional experiences of professional relationships? Part 2 addresses such questions and explores ways in which wise personal and affective engagement might be thought about and developed in professional practice.

In chapter 7, David Carr explores the relationship between the personal and the interpersonal in ‘people professional’ relationships philosophically and conceptually. He argues that some of the philosophical trouble arises from conceptual confusion between the terms ‘impartial’ and ‘impersonal’. But even if impartiality need not be equated with impersonal forms of behaviour, prevailing deontological approaches to professional ethics provide no satisfactory guidance in relation to emotional engagement within professional practice. He therefore turns to two possible alternatives: the ethics of care and Aristotelian virtue ethics. As he explains, the latter places better emphasis on the moral character required of professionals and the importance of its cultivation in the training, practice and ethical frameworks of people professionals.

In chapter 8, Kristján Kristjánsson picks up on questions concerning the moral character of professionals, with a particular focus on schoolteachers, noting the recent proliferation of studies of teachers’ professional identities and the emotional dimension of teaching. He argues that the literature on both issues has become saddled with what he calls the ‘constructivist-cognitive’ paradigm, according to which agents, including teachers and other professionals, have multiple identities but no actual selves, and emotions are understood either as non-cognitive thrusts or as exercises of social power. He exposes the weaknesses of this paradigm, and paves the way for an Aristotle-inspired alternative.

Historically, one aspect of identity of particular relevance to the composition and character of professions has been gender. The growth of the people professions has been associated with what is sometimes called the ‘feminisation’ of professions. In chapter 9, Liz Bondi explores the natures of these trends and poses questions about the impact of gender on what we understand by professional wisdom. Using debates about emotion as an

example, she shows how ideas about ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ attributes and orientations continue to impact upon the value accorded to different aspects of professional wisdom.

Work is where many of us live for many hours a day and yet the emotional importance of work in people’s lives is often downplayed. In chapter 10, Susie Orbach argues for greater emotional literacy at work, focusing on professions for which relationships with others are key. Her account explores questions of the underlying motivations that draw people into these professions and offers concepts from psychoanalysis to help us think about and manage the emotional dilemmas we face at work. She concludes by using the Jungian concept of the shadow, which posits that there are always forces at work that seek to undo or do the opposite of our conscious intent and the overt intentions of the organisations in which we work.

In chapter 11, which concludes part 2, John Swinton argues that imagination is a vital ingredient of professional wisdom, which he considers needs to be combined with the idea of practitioners in the people professions serving as guides and healers to individuals, particularly in times of personal crisis. In this context he explores the wisdom of L’Arche communities, which offer support for people with learning disabilities based on Jean Vanier’s (1999) *The Way of the Heart*. As he shows, this approach is not simply another mode of caring for people but is a way of being with and learning from people with intellectual disabilities. As a form of professional wisdom it requires us to think in new ways about the relevance of friendship.

The third section of the book addresses often complex issues around the effect of legislation and regulation on professional judgement; the ways both positive and negative in which the demands of the state or of professional bodies impact on how professionals

deliberate and decide. There are contributions to this section from the fields of social work, counselling, ministry and social policy.

In chapter 12, Sue White notes the disparity between the way clinicians often display uncertainty about technologies and their own diagnoses and the way social workers and practitioners are much less equivocal in offering opinions about human relationships. She uses ethnographic research conducted in children's departments in England and Wales to illustrate the effect of a raft of government reforms, particularly the e-enabled assessment instruments which are, she argues, pushing social workers towards precipitous categorisations and action.

In the next chapter, Kathleen Marshall and Maggie Mellon draw on research by the office of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People to show how state regulation originally intended to protect children has led to paranoia and risk averse behaviour in innocent adults. They graphically illustrate by means of three stories how the mechanisation of relationships between adults and children has developed, denying children the creative play that they need for development, and leaving adults searching for 'guidelines' to follow that will exonerate them in the eyes of the media and society at large should things go wrong. We are, they argue, at risk of undermining healthy social relationships between adults and children – relationships that both children and adults need.

The next two chapters address, from very different perspectives, the area of professional judgement in ministry. In chapter 14, Alison Elliot reflects on the way ministers have to negotiate the boundaries between voluntary, professional and business sectors whose attitudes and values are potentially in conflict. She explores how the concept of the psychological contract can bridge some of the differences. Illustrating her argument

from research on a faith-based project about homelessness she demonstrates that reflective ministerial practice can be remarkably robust in navigating the challenges of voluntary action in the present culture of regulation.

In chapter 15, Cecelia Clegg assesses the lack of accountability in the profession of ministry that has, until the middle of this decade, managed to avoid professionalisation and regulation. Noting that the practitioner is the main ‘tool’ in ministry she argues that pastoral supervision must be a major element in developing wise practice. This is especially true in light of the particular features of pastoral ministry, in terms of the movement of the Spirit and making religious truth claims, which both require accountability and discernment if they are to be lived positively. With the formation of the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE) in 2008 and the subsequent opening of a route for accrediting pastoral supervisors, there is now a formal structure to underpin and encourage the practise of pastoral supervision – one in which she contends the churches must invest.

The closing contribution of the collection is made by Nick Totton who, in a provocative essay, argues that good therapy cannot also be ‘safe’. He contrasts the emphasis on boundaries with creativity and relationship, claiming that therapy should not be domesticated but wild. He laments the rise of the ‘normal’ practitioner and the re-medicalisation of therapy driven by the rise in therapist numbers and hunger for status. He favours ‘local knowledge’ and ‘thick description’ over the primacy given to expert knowledge, contending that scientific research has shown that ‘neither technique nor training significantly affect the benefits reported’ (page xxx). Teasing out the current context in terms of a society that wants to control life, especially the unconscious, and to

alleviate suffering, he argues that individual psychotherapists and the psychotherapy profession must choose whether or not to stand against this fantasy.

While the editors, as sometime contributors to the literature on these issues, have also seen fit to contribute invited chapters to this volume, they would like to express their especial thanks to the authors of invited contributions in this work. It is largely due to these distinguished colleagues that the present volume has been able to present – so we believe – a wide range of quality pioneering essays on the nature of professionalism and professional practice from leaders in the field of contemporary reflection on these issues. In this regard, the editors have every confidence that the present volume will be of considerable academic and professional value to a wide professional clientele – including theorists of the professions, policy makers and practitioners – in such fields as teaching, social work, nursing, ministry, psychotherapy, counselling as well as other professions.

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